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Sexuality, gender and youth sport

Jan Wright
University of Wollongong, jwright@uow.edu.au

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Abstract

There are two main themes underpinning most research and writing on gender, sexuality and youth sports: a concern with social inequalities based on gender and sexuality, and a concern with sport as a site where limiting gender norms are (re)produced for boys, girls, young women and men. The two themes are not distinct but are often intertwined in discussions of gender and sexuality in relation to youth sports. For example, girls' limited access to and different experience of sports, such as the different codes of football, are not only about fewer resources or opportunities but about the ways the practices associated with football as a traditional male sport celebrate and train for particular forms of [hegemonic] masculinity, thereby putting at risk the claim to being appropriately female of those girls and women who might want to play. In addition, such practices also work to exclude and put at risk those boys who do not demonstrate socially valued forms of masculinity in their performance of the game, or who choose not to play the game. These themes have been explored in relation to school sports, community and club youth sports, contemporary and action sports and from the perspectives of sociology of sport and cultural studies.

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Why is sexuality and gender an issue in youth sports?

There are two main themes underpinning most research and writing on gender, sexuality and youth sports: a concern with social inequalities based on gender and sexuality, and a concern with sport as a site where limiting gender norms are (re)produced for boys, girls, young women and men. The two themes are not distinct but are often intertwined in discussions of gender and sexuality in relation to youth sports. For example, girls' limited access to and different experience of sports, such as the different codes of football, are not only about fewer resources or opportunities but about the ways the practices associated with football as a traditional male sport celebrate and train for particular forms of [hegemonic] masculinity, thereby putting at risk the claim to being appropriately female of those girls and women who might want to play. In addition, such practices also work to exclude and put at risk those boys who do not demonstrate socially valued forms of masculinity in their performance of the game, or who choose not to play the game. These themes have been explored in relation to school sports, community and club youth sports, contemporary and action sports and from the perspectives of sociology of sport and cultural studies.

An additional theme also requires some attention. More recently, and less well covered in academic literature, is the use of youth sport as a tool for empowering girls and challenging gender relations in local communities. Although the idea of empowering girls through sport is not new and indeed has been part of the argument for encouraging girls' participation since the nineteenth century (Scraton, 1992) and for minority communities in 'developed' countries (Cooky, 2009), more recently this has become a global endeavor targeting girls in 'disadvantaged' communities, in the context of sport for development and peace (Hayhurst, 2013; Right to Play International, 2012).

Approaching the topic

The topic of gender, sexuality and youth sports is complex with a history of different theoretical positions and different motivations prompting research in the area. The other difficulty in approaching this topic is not because of any dearth of research on gender, sexuality and sport, but because there is so little research that clearly identifies itself as focusing on 'youth sport'. Much of the research, for example on gender, sexuality and contemporary sports (e.g. skateboarding and youth subcultures), is clearly about young people. Since it is mostly teenagers and young adults who participate, however, participants are not identified necessarily by age. Classic works such as Messner's (2009, 2011) study of gender production in youth sports through his examination of adult volunteers in sport and Ian Wellard's (2007) collection, *Rethinking Gender and Youth Sports*, are more targeted. However, to only focus on these would ignore a wealth of other research. The approach taken then has been an inclusive one, using edited collections on sociology of sport, database searches of journals such as, *Sociology of Sport, Sport Education and Society, Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, following up on references in articles, relying on my own and colleagues knowledge of writers in the field and chasing up their most recent work through Google searches. I have tried to cover literature from North America, UK, Australia and New Zealand and to a lesser extent Europe. I feel remiss in not referencing more work from Asia, Africa and South America. One of the challenges has been the proliferation of research in the fields of sociology of sport and cultural studies exploring sporting youth subcultures from a multitude of perspectives. In this writing, race and ethnicity are difficult to tease out from gender and sexuality, for example, Atencio, Beal and Yochim's (2013) study of the reproduction of 'Skurban' masculinities in media and marketing productions associated with skateboarding. I have therefore tried to pull out those themes related specifically to gender and sexuality; the intersection of race, ethnicity, social class and gender are covered in other chapters in this Handbook.

Gender inequalities

The home page for the 2013 conference of International Working Group on Women in Sport (IWG) epitomizes the liberal feminist approach that prompted the first arguments and research on girls' unequal access and opportunities in sport. The page includes a summary of the UK report from the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) headed, "Startling gender gap between UK school-aged girls and

boys" (IWG, 2013). The report points to schools as holding the key to addressing the alleged gap in participation levels. The findings of this report are not new; nor is the advice to schools, which is in itself disturbing. However, what the report points to is the endurance of concerns (and solutions) from similar reports in the 1970s and 1980s when liberal feminist approaches to gender inequalities were at their height.

The theme of gender inequalities in sport has arguably been historically the earliest and most persistent in the literature on gender and youth sports. This literature has focused on the 'unfair' exclusion, for the most part of girls and young women, from sports that have been dominated in numbers, attention and resources by boys and young men. With a more nuanced attention to privilege within groups of girls and boys, notions of exclusion have more recently been extended to specific groups of girls and, to a lesser extent, boys (see, for example,Wellard, 2002, 2012). The literature on gender inequalities, for the most part, seems to respond to the idea that the absence of particular groups of children and young people from sport, mostly girls and young women, limits their access to important social and personal experiences that are valuable for themselves, their health and for society – the 'goods' of sport, which have been seen to benefit boys and young men.

The majority of the literature, from a sociological perspective, attributes girls' and some boys' 'lack of interest' to the social structures and practices associated with sports themselves or to competing interests in young people's lives. Research which involves interviews with teachers, coaches and organisers, those who set up the conditions for young people's participation, suggest that gender differences in interest and ability are taken for granted and indeed are actively, if unintentionally, constructed by the practices (Cooky, 2009; Flintoff, 2008; Messner, 2009). For example, many of the sports organization, council and sporting personnel Cooky (2009) interviewed (regarding reasons for girls' lower participation in community sports) explained this in terms of girls' lack of interest and ability in sports – characteristics which her respondents saw as inherent in being female. In this ethnographic study contrasting the approaches of local councils and their support for girls' sport, Cooky also demonstrated how this 'lack of interest', as manifest in their non-attendance, was socially constructed in the many different and subtle ways in which the sports were presented.

As research consistently reports, the majority of young girls *do* like sport and would like to do more (Bailey, Wellard, & Dismore, 2005; Wellard, 2011). They are excluded from sport for "a variety of often competing and complex factors" (Wellard, 2011, p.46), such as the influence of friends and family, a perceived lack of skill and knowledge for the sports on offer, negative experiences of sport and physical education (PE) at school, competing interests and priorities, costs and transport. A study by Eime and colleagues (Eime, Payne, Casey, & Harvey, 2008), for example, demonstrated how the decisions of the young rural women (16-17 years) were contingent on other priorities associated with transitions during adolescence. While the girls in their study enjoyed their involvement in community sports, their desire to succeed educationally was a critical factor in decisions to move from structured club sport to more flexible individual activities.

In response to the many reports on girls', *and it is always girls'*, low participation in both school and community sport, over the past 45 years numerous programmes and initiatives have been instituted, some of which have targeted women's participation and have had flow on effects for girls, such as Title IX in the United States, and others that have specifically targeted girls. These have been supported by local and national governments, and by philanthropic and corporate sponsorship. The latter include, most recently, programmes such as the Canadian Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) community project, GoGirlGo! (WSF, 2011), which describes itself as an "award winning curriculum and sports education programmes, works to improve the health of sedentary girls and keeps girls involved in physical activity by supporting programmes and organizations that work with girls", and the UK School Sports Partnership Programme (SSPP), where girls and young women were one group targeted to improve participation. Flintoff (2008) investigated how "gender equity issues" were taken up by teachers involved in the SSPP. She concluded that there was little evidence of improved 'inclusivity' and explains this in terms of: the prevalence of essentialist masculinist discourses associated with competitive sport practices; and the positioning of the teachers within an equality of access or difference discourse, which assumed categorical differences between girls' and boys' interests and capabilities. Like others working in this area (for example, Wellard 2011), Flintoff

(2008, p.395) asks, "How could gender equity permeate practices associated with youth sport in ways that would ensure all boys and girls have a quality experience?"

Although those writing about PE might pose questions that include boys as well as girls, in the literature on community sports less attention is paid to boys' experiences of exclusion. The few exceptions attend specifically to boys in non-traditional male sports (Chimot & Louveau, 2010; Wellard, 2002). There seems to have been little attention to the experiences of boys who 'dropout' of sports, nor is there any strong discourse about gender inequalities as they relate to boys and young men in this literature. A notable exception to the latter is the work of Messner on gender, families and youth sports, *It's All for the Kids* (Messner, 2009). While the study reported in the book primarily focused on the adults involved with youth sports, Messner concluded from his observations that youth sports coaches' views of children are explained by an ascendant gender ideology he calls "soft essentialism": "a shared belief in natural differences between girls and boys that exists alongside more relativized and noncategorical views of girls and boys as flexible choosers in social life, and still largely categorical views of men and women" (Messner, 2011, p.166). Messner argues that this ideology (in the context of the middle class practices of team sports) is harder on boys than it is on girls.

> Rather than being a focus of gender revolution, … youth sports has become an ideal site for the construction of adult narratives that appropriate the liberal feminist language of "choice" for girls, but not for boys, in ways that help to recreate and naturalize the continuing gender inequalities in professional class work and family life. (p.154)

The research reported in this section points to the complexities of researching and theorizing inequalities in youth sport, and the different discourses that have come into play over time and within different social and cultural contexts. It is clear that gender equality cannot be examined without attention to the specificities of context and the diverse identifications of the girls and boys, young men and women involved in the any study.

Constructing masculinities and femininities

With the influence of social constructionist theories and particularly poststructuralist feminism, queer theory and masculinities theory, attention has turned to sport and associated cultural sites as spaces where discourses and practices (re)produce hierarchies of gender norms for boys and girls, young women and men. This is proposed as happening not only through the practices associated with sport itself, but through the images of sport produced in and through media coverage of sport events, commentary on sports and athletes and the marketing of sports and non-sports related products. These texts serve as discursive resources for how young people come to understand gender and sexuality and how they constitute their own gender and sexual identities, both in relation to sport and in their lives more broadly. Research and writing from these perspectives includes the analysis of images and written texts such as those produced by the media, advertising, marketing and textbooks (see for example, Atencio, Beal, & Yochim, 2013; Cooky, 2011; Grahn, 2012; Rinehart, 2005). Research informed by a social constructivist perspective also includes work that examines the ways interactions and practices in sporting contexts shape gender identities and attitudes to sport and physical activity, and how participants negotiate gender relations in differing sporting contexts (Atencio, Beal, & Wilson, 2009; Chimot & Louveau, 2010; Garrett, 2004; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000; MacPhail, Collier, & O'Sullivan, 2009; Wilson, White, & Fisher, 2001).

While there have obviously been shifts in what constitutes socially valued forms of masculinity and femininity, the research on the construction of gender suggests that the changes in gender norms have not been as profound as one might like. Sport continues to be valued in schools and communities as a space where boys and young men learn and express the attributes of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2008). As such sport, becomes a dangerous place for those boys who do not ‘measure up’; boys, who are not ‘good’ at sport, who are small, develop at a slower rate, or who choose not to participate, face violence, ridicule and humiliation (Wellard, 2012). Sport is a place where bodies are displayed and, in school contexts, where participation is more difficult to avoid, research demonstrates how change rooms and practices such as playing teams with shirts off/on leave boys vulnerable to bullying and victimization (Drummond, 2011). Such practices also confirm the masculine identities of these boys as lower in value than the forms of masculinity expressed by those ‘other’ boys who are successful in sports. Those boys who dare to participate in a ‘feminine’ sports,

such as rhythmic gymnastics or dance (Chimot & Louveau, 2010; Gard 2008), are also confronted with considerable challenges. Chimot and Louveau (2010), for example, describe the different strategies the boys in their study, who participated in rhythmic gymnastics, had to implement to deal with the pressure from family and peers to discontinue their participation, and to negotiate between the negative masculine identity ascribed to them by others and the one they defined for themselves. As Messner (2011) suggests, for some boys, particularly in comparison to middle class girls, there seem still to be fewer choices, and more rigid lines around what constitutes socially valued forms of masculinity in sporting contexts.

In contrast to the relatively small amount of research on the experiences of boys in sport, there is considerably more research on the ways women and girls negotiate the terrain of sport as a male domain. Some of this research, which will be explored further under the topic of 'subculture research', documents the ways in which girls and young women are excluded by forms of symbolic violence (homophobia), which challenge their femaleness, particularly when they attempt to participate in traditional male sports and sports which demand strong physical bodies and aggressive play. In this context when culturally valued forms of femininity clash with the forms of physicality required of their sport, they are required to negotiate conflicting expectations. Much of this research, however, also seeks to explore the opportunities in and through sport for resistance and challenging gender norms.

As will become evident below (under youth sport subcultures) and, as researchers such as Cooky (2011), Azzarito (2011) and Heywood (2007) argue, while there may appear to have been more changes in what constitutes female physicality, the underpinning flows of power have changed little. These researchers all acknowledge that Title IX has made a substantial difference in the numbers of girls and young women participating in sport. As Cooky (2011, p.210) points out "sport is no longer reserved for an elite group of highly skilled girls and women, but appears as a normal part of girls' and women's everyday lives (Heywood & Dworkin 2003)". She points particularly to the success of the US soccer team in the 1999 Women's World Cup "as an emotionally riveting spectacle of girls' and women's empowerment in sport … part of the cultural imagery of Girl Power!" (Cooky, 2011, p.211). With the very public successes of athletes such as the Williams sisters, and various iconic female

athletes across Australia, UK, Canada and USA, it looked like feminism had been successful and equality had finally been achieved in sport and that, in a post-feminist world, girls could do anything.

However, as Cooky (2011, p.211) and others (Azzarito, 2011; Heywood, 2007) argue, the successes of elite athletes and teams did not translate into "increased participation, increased opportunities, or broader shifts in the *structural* landscape of sport". While elite female tennis players might command the same prize money and earn equal pay, these achievements rarely trickled down to the average female athlete (Cooky, 2011). While media images of athletes promoted new forms of female physicality, "the power chick" who was strong and competitive was also, like the Williams sisters, Sharapova and others, "heterosexy and feminine" (p.219). In the late 2000s, Cooky argues, the marketing of female athletes has become even more sexualized and associated with what she call "strip culture", with athleticism downplayed as athletes, such as Sharapova, pose in underwear. She argues that "the lack of popular cultural texts [compared to those associated with Girl Power in the late 1990s] today addressing girls as sport participants, spectators and consumers suggests that Girl Power! served primarily as a marketing discourse, rather than a sustained and ongoing instrument of political change in girls' lives" (p.223).

In the neoliberal landscape of the 2000s, feminist social researchers, (for example, Azzarito 2011; Cooky, 2011; Heywood, 2007), argue that female athletes and those who look up to them, are encouraged to become entrepreneurial individualists, rather than recognize the structural inequalities still facing girls every day and in sport. Heywood (2007), for example, argues that programmes such as WSF GoGirlGo, through their marketing, encourage girls and young women to emulate the "future [post-feminist] girl" who is celebrated for her "desire, determination and confidence to take charge of her life, seize chances, and achieve her goals" (Harris 2004; quoted in Heywood 2007, p.103). In her analysis of GoGirlGo, Heywood demonstrates how in the marketing of the programmes,

> The female athlete and female athleticism and strength are literal embodiments of Girl Power, the subject who is, through her accomplishment

> and good lessons she learns in sport, supposed to develop her strength, health and self-confidence and apply these to her career goals (2007, p.115)

Such post-feminist messages, Cooky (2011, p.217) argues, obscure "the structural inequalities girls face every day" and promote "individualism and individual empowerment over collective empowerment". The hierarchies of femininity promoted in and through sport thus (re)produce social values promoted in contemporary western neoliberal societies, such as an emphasis on individual responsibility for achievement and self-development. These are values, Cooky and Heywood argue, that continue to privilege those young women who are able to make their own way – girls and young women who have the economic, social and cultural capital to succeed.

Gender, sexuality and youth sport sub-cultures

One prominent area of scholarship in the sociology of sport is the exploration of the ways in which, what have been called variously contemporary sports/action sports/ 'new' youth sports/lifestyle sports (re)produce or offer sites of resistance for normative gender relations. Most of these sports, such as skateboarding, windsurfing, surfing and snowboarding, are characterized by "creative, aesthetic, and performative expressions of their activities" (Wheaton 2004, p.298). Participants, according to Wheaton look for pleasure in the 'buzz', the ecstasy of speed, being at one with the environment, the standing still of time; they engage in "playful practices" (Midol & Broyer, 1995; quoted in Wheaton 2004, p.298) and often take risks. For some, part of the excitement is the subversive challenge to mainstream culture. In the early writing on these 'alternative' sports, great hopes were expressed that, in their challenges to mainstream culture, these sports would provide spaces that encouraged "femininity and masculinity to be embodied in a variety of shapes and ways that allow power to be embodied in ways not tied to domination or gender" (Whitson, 1994, p.368)

This hope has become a theme in much of the research on subcultures in relation to gender. For example, Rinehart (2005, p.232) asks whether "the much-vaunted alternative ethos of action sports lead to a concomitant paradigm shift in fundamental attitudes towards race, class, gender differences within these sports forms?" The answer seems quite complex, however. In general it seems that the power to define relations and identities in lifestyle sports still rests with the boys and men in the

sports. These sports are still sites of hegemonic masculine identity production, although the expression of that masculinity might be differ from that valued in traditional team sports. In her study of "competing masculinities in the windsurfing culture", Wheaton (2004), for example, demonstrates how, "despite windsurfing's counter cultural heritage and the 'feminized' appearance of some male windsurfers … traditional 'hegemonic' masculinity predominates at the 'core' of the subculture" (Wheaton, 2004, p.136). In another example, Waitt (2007, p.107) remarks of the youth surfing subculture that he was studying: "I was struck by how surfing remains an initiation into a normative expression of European manhood". As the quote from Atencio and colleagues (Atencio, Beal, & Wilson, 2009) below suggests, gendered hierarchies still operate in skateboarding, particularly in its 'street' or 'free' versions.

> Masculine habituses were most closely associated with risk-taking behaviours and technical prowess; they became significantly rewarded with social and cultural capital. Conversely, women's habituses were considered as lacking in skill and aversive to risk-taking. Women thus came to be positioned as inauthentic participants in the street skateboarding social field and were largely excluded from accessing symbolic capital. (Atencio et al 2009, p.3)

It would seem that the practices of male participants in these 'new' sports still exclude girls and young women because of their assumed 'feminine' qualities, which either make their participation unsuitable or less valued. This is not to say that there are not exceptions both within and between sports. In skateboarding, for example, in the paper cited above, Atencio et al (2009) describe corporately organized 'All Girl' events and 'niche media' that supported the female skateboarders in their study. Thorpe (2005), in her study of women in snowboarding, describes how women, in the sport from the very early days, benefited from the commercialization of the sport, and were able to command high salaries and compete on an equal level to men in the Olympics. She describes how women worked collaboratively to form women's companies and were involved in marketing and brand development, including clothing and women's boards: "The increasingly active and significant role of the female snowboarder suggests that the gender relations in snowboarding are dynamic, rather than fixed, and contested, rather than agreed." (Thorpe, 2005, p.81) However, Thorpe goes on to argue that "much of the evidence of positive progress is

superficial" (p.83). In a way similar to the shifts in female athleticism described above by Cooky, competition both in sport and in the marketplace also encouraged individualism with women snowboarders becoming less supportive of each other. Thorpe concludes that "the snowboarding industry employs a variety of overt and covert strategies to reinforce female 'otherness' and male superiority". In ways that resonate with Waitt's (2007) discussion of surfing, she writes,

> The masculinity of snowboarding appears common sense through the emphasis on male physicality and power with a focus on war, violence, injury and risk taking. The prominence of the male physicality in snowboarding is a 'subtle form of symbolic domination rather than overt physical control, which contributes to the reproduction and reinforcement of power relations inherent in the existing gender order' (Gillett and White 1992: 363). (Thorpe, 2005, p.87)

Sexuality and youth sport

The social construction of masculinities and femininities in and through sport, clearly points to gendered or sexual hierarchies where heterosexuality is for the most part the unspoken norm (Wellard, 2012). What this means is that issues of sexuality per se seem to be rarely addressed in relation to youth sports – for example, we know very little about how young lesbians, gay men or transgender young people negotiate the discourses and practices of youth sports. What little research there is focuses primarily on school sport and PE and the symbolic and real violence of homophobia and its effects on, mostly young men's, participation. If youth sports 'mimic' sports more generally then as a site where 'hegemonic masculinities are made and remade' (Wellard 2012, p.104) they are unlikely to be a welcoming environment for sexual minorities. Wellard suggests that in environments highly regulated by adults within and outside the school context, gay and lesbian young people have fewer options than when they are adults.

At the same time, some sports serve as spaces where women whose bodies do not conform to normative heterosexual forms of femininity can enjoy themselves and find like-minded young women. The young lesbian women in Kivel and Klieber's (2000) study, for example, chose their sports in high school for their potential to provide opportunities for meeting other women like themselves. Some sports provided a safe

place in which to express their sexuality. On the other hand, the gay boys in the same study tended to avoid sports, preferring not to be in or around the kind of "male atmosphere", the macho attitude and violence in sports "where they separated the males from the females" (p.224). Others lesbian and gay youth in this study distanced themselves from sports that might have led to their identification as gay or lesbian.

While there has been a rise in organized sporting events and specific competitions or teams for gay and lesbian, there is little research on how these impact on young people. Does the public nature of the gay games for example, open up possibilities for a more public expression of identity? Do young people seek out such opportunities? How inclusive are competitive contexts such as the gay games for all bodies and capabilities? In general research on the experiences of young gay, lesbian, transgender and transsexuals is an area in community and club sports is an area missing from the youth sport research.

Sport for development: empowering girls through sport

A recent area of prominence in relation to gender and youth sport, which has received only limited academic attention, is the sport and development programmes focused specifically on 'empowering' young women and girls. Many of these programmes are motivated by the UN millennium Development Goal – "promoting gender equality and the empowering of women" (United Nations, 2013). This call has been taken up and supported through funding, resources and personnel by non-government organisations (NGOs), sport federations, transnational corporations (TNCs) and UN agencies in 'developing' countries and communities throughout the world (Hayhurst, 2013). On the International Platform on Sport and Development (2013a) website, "Sport & Development" "refers to the use of sport as a tool for development and peace". While there are initiatives reported on the website that address children and youth development more broadly, gender is targeted as an area of specific interest. The website argues that, "In recent years, there has been a significant shift from advocating for 'gender equity in sport' towards using 'sport for gender equity and personal development" (2013b). Sport thus becomes a tool for enhancing "girls' sense of agency, self-empowerment and personal freedom, in promoting their social inclusion and social integration in their communities, in challenging oppressive gender norms and lastly in offering girls opportunities for leadership and

achievement". The website describes a number of case studies, such as the Kenyan "Moving the Goal Posts" Project to illustrate how sports programmes in 'developing' countries have achieved this. Other projects (such as, the Nike "Girls Effect" campaign) go further to imagine girls as "agents of development … capable of bringing about 'unparalleled social and economic change to their families, communities and countries' (Girl Effect 2001)" (Hayhurst, 2013, para.1.1)

Despite the proliferation of these projects, there has been little research into their effects. Two notable exceptions are Brady's (2005) analysis of the outcomes of a large scale mixed-sex NGO supported programme in the slums of Nairobi and an experimental pilot project in traditional Upper Egyptian villages and Hayhurst's (2013) study of girls' experiences of a corporate funded gender and development martial arts programme. Brady found that the girls' involvement in sport, though very different in each programme, helped to build their "social assets" through assisting the girls build social networks and by bringing them into "the public sphere", thereby beginning "to transform gender norms" (p.36)

Hayhurst (2013, p.1) also argues that the programme she studied, achieved many of its stated goals: "the … programme increased the young women's confidence, challenged gender norms, augmented their social networks, improved their physical fitness and was useful in providing employment opportunities". She points to the complex and subtle forms of agency and opposition, "subversive agency", that the girls exerted in challenging traditional gender norms in the face of opposition and verbal and physical abuse from their communities. Like Cooky, Azzarito and Heywood, however, Hayhurst, also argues that Girl Effect programmes place the onus on the girls and young women as agents of change, often in the face of considerable community resistance, and without structural support "in their quest to challenge gender norms" (para.8.4). Hayhurst argues that at this point in time, "there seems to be a lack of understanding as to how the intentions of these programmes … are actually *translated in practice* – particularly into their wider communities and through their interactions with family members" (para.8.6, italics in the original).

Identifying ways forward for the future

Although the area of gender and sport has been one of the perennial areas of sport research, there are still important areas, particularly in relation to youth sport, that have yet to be explored. Clearly from the research discussed above, despite changes in the nature of sport and greater social acceptance of a diverse range of femininities and masculinities, sport remains one of the more (perhaps one of the most) conservative sites for the acceptance of difference and the (re)production of narrow and limiting gender norms. Are youth sports, as Messner (2011, p.166) suggests, "largely a homosocial realm run by men" or are there new configurations that provide viable alternatives? This is a fruitful space for further research; research, for example, into organizations such as *i9 Sport* (Anderson, 2012), an American corporate franchise which claims to offer a different experience for children and youth, including one that is "gender-integrated".

While there has been a shift towards research on masculinities in sport, there is still a considerable gap in the literature on the experiences of boys and young men in (or not in) youth sport, particularly in relation to the experiences of young men who identify themselves as gay. More research is needed into the experiences of young gay, lesbian transsexual and transgender participants in youth sports in general and in sports that are specifically designated as gay and lesbian sports.

In relation to youth subculture sport, Wheaton (2007, p.296) suggests that studies need to be "more attentive to poststructuralist, postmodernist and postcolonial debates around difference", with greater attention to girls' and young women's involvement in subcultures and to "how different, contradictory, and competing femininities and masculinities are constructed and exhibited in various lifestyle sport subcultural settings". The same could be said of all aspects of youth sport, in its various manifestations in schools, communities and clubs, and in relation to young people in western and non-western countries, including the impact of neoliberalism and globalization on the ways in which gender plays out in youth sports.

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Professor Jan Wright is a Professorial Fellow in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong and Guest Professor at Deakin University, Australia. Her research draws on feminist poststructuralist theory to critically engage issues associated with embodiment, culture and health. Her most recent work has focused on the place and meaning of health and physical activity in children and young people's lives. She is coeditor of *Body Knowledge and Control* (Routledge 2004), *Critical Inquiry and Problem Solving in Physical Education* (Routledge 2004), *Biopolitics and the Obesity Epidemic* (Routledge 2009) and *Young People, Physical Activity and the*

Everyday (Routledge 2010) and co-author with Michael Gard of *The Obesity Epidemic: Science, Ideology and Morality* (Routledge 2005).